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ABSTRACT

Elementary school students often exhibit a lack of social skills that interferes with positive classroom interaction. This action research project examined the impact of an intervention for improving respect for others, self control, and listening to increase cooperative behavior in students. The targeted population consisted of a class of fourth grade students from a middle class suburban community. Their lack of social skills was documented by means of anecdotal records from the classroom teacher and the researcher, a teacher checklist of deficit social skill areas completed by the researcher during the initial cooperative group experience, and a survey of the 24 students. The intervention consisted of: (1) changes to make the classroom conducive to cooperation through prosocial signs and sayings to promote values; (2) direct teaching of social skills; and (3) cooperative learning activities to foster prosocial behavior. Social skills instruction occurred 30 minutes weekly from September through December using book lessons, T-charts, practice, observation and reflection on skills, and rewards for displaying positive targeted behaviors. Data collection methods to assess effectiveness included teacher checklists, anecdotal records, and student surveys conducted on a pre-post basis. Findings indicated that there was a decrease in the number of skill deficit areas observed in the targeted class. The majority of student responses were in favor of working in cooperative groups. (Six appendices include the data collection forms. Contains 19 references.) (KB)

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IMPROVING COOPERATIVE BEHAVIOR THROUGH THE USE OF SOCIAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This report describes an intervention program for improving social skills in order to increase cooperative behavior in students. The targeted population consisted of a fourth grade class in a middle class suburban community. The lack of social skills development interfered with positive interaction among peers in the classroom which was documented through teacher observation, teacher checklists and student surveys.

After analyzing probable cause data, it revealed that students today are lacking exposure to social skills instruction. The data also revealed that a significant amount of TV models negatively fostered an anti-social, anti-caring behavior. Therefore, students are growing up in an ever-declining society that has been poisoned by events such as teenage suicide, unemployment, drug abuse, drop out rates, poverty, self interest and material goods.

Upon reviewing various solution strategies by knowledgeable others, and analyzing the problem setting, two intervention strategies resulted. Long's (1995) prosocial signs and sayings to promote values, and Bellanca and Fogarty 's (1991) strategies for teaching social skills will be used to increase the positive behavior and prosocial classroom environment.

Results of this study show findings in favor of social skills instruction to improve cooperative behavior. After implementing the intervention strategies, the data suggests a decrease in the number of skill deficit areas observed in the targeted class. Pre and post assessment procedures also show the majority of student responses were in favor of working in cooperative groups. Social skills instruction has proven to be beneficial to students who lack these skills which are necessary to be successful in today's classrooms.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted fourth grade class exhibit a lack of social skills development that interfere with positive interaction among peers in the classroom. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes teacher observation, teacher checklists, and student surveys.

Immediate Problem Context

This action research project takes place in a K-5 elementary school. The targeted school is located in a district that is near a major metropolitan area. The school opened for classes in August of 1997. Therefore, there was no School Report Card for the target site for the 1996-1997 school year. The information for the following tables 1-5 was derived from the 1996-1997 School Report Card for a neighboring elementary school where the majority of the students at the target site will be transferred from. However, because there are no statistics for this new elementary building, all information given will be based on the targeted district, giving a broader base of all factual information.

Table 1 represents the racial/ethnic characteristics and the total enrollment of the targeted district. The majority of the students are white. Compared to the state, the district has a higher percentage of white and Asian/Pacific Islander, yet the district percentage of Black and Hispanic students is lower.

Table 1

Racial/Ethnic Characteristics and Total Enrollment

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/P. Islander	Native American	Total Enrollment
District	86.1%	5.8%	2.5%	5.6%	0.1%	15,450
State	64%	20.6%	12.2%	3.1%	0.1%	1,906,599

Table 2 represents the economic data and the limited-English-proficiency of the students in the district. Low income students represent families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. Limited-English-proficient are those who have been found to be eligible for bilingual education. The district percentage of low-income and limited-English-proficient students is significantly lower than that of the state (District Report Card, 1996-1997).

Table 2

Low-Income and Limited-English-Proficient Students

	Low-Income	Limited-English-Proficient
District	1.1%	0.9%
State	34.9%	5.9%

Table 3 represents attendance patterns which include mobility and chronic truancy. A perfect attendance rate (100%) means that all students attended school every day. The student mobility rate is based on the number of students who enroll in or leave a school during the school year. Students may be counted more than once. Chronic truants are students who were absent from school without valid cause for 10% or more of the last 180 school days.

Table 3

Attendance Patterns

	Attendance	Student Mobility	Chronic Truancy
District	95.5%	13.0%	0.3%
State	93.5%	18.8%	2.3%

Table 4 represents the average class size in elementary classrooms. Average class size is calculated by the total enrollment for a grade divided by the number of classes for that grade reported for the first school day in May.

The district's class sizes are slightly higher than the state's. This is due to the rapidly growing community which this district serves. Three new schools, one high school, one middle school, and one elementary school, will be built for the upcoming school year. Four more schools will be opening the following school year. This should alleviate the problem of overcrowding and large class size.

Table 4

Average Class Size

	Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2
District	23.0	24.2	26.4
State	23.0	22.7	22.8

The population at the target site is a fourth grade class. Within the classroom there is one learning disabled student, two gifted students, one bilingual student, and two speech and language impaired students. Students receive physical education instruction three times a week for 25 minutes. Music instruction is given twice a week for 25 minutes, while art instruction for is once a week for 30 minutes. The students have a 20 minute lunch period, with 15 minutes allowed for recess after lunch.

The targeted site is a new school building which opened in August of 1997. The site is completely handicap-accessible as the school follows the inclusion model and will serve students with a wide range of disabilities. The students at the targeted site have access to many educational programs. They

have access to a computer lab as well as a library media center. The site has an English as a Second Language class within the school. Project Arrow, the district's gifted program, is available for those students who qualify in grades one through five. This program focuses on increasing critical and creative thinking skills through activities that complement the regular curriculum. The district also has a Supported Education program in place for those students who need special education services. The goal of this program is to educate children with special needs in their neighborhood school with their typical peers whenever possible. Students served are those with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, autism, mild to moderate mental and/or physical handicaps, as well as hearing and vision impaired. Many after school programs are offered to the students at the targeted site such as intramural sports, band, orchestra, chorus, and clubs. The local YMCA offers before and after school child care right at the school. The targeted site also has a very active Parent Council, which provides support for the school's many academic, enrichment, and social activities.

The Surrounding Community

The targeted site is located in a school district that serves three neighboring communities. The three middle schools in the district feed into two high schools. The total enrollment of the district as stated in the 1996-1997 School Report Card is 15,450. In March of 1994, the residents of the community approved a $97.25 million referendum to construct a second new high school, a

fourth middle school, four new elementary schools, and additions to two others (District School Report Card, 1996-1997).

The information in Table 5 categorizes teaching staff by their professional characteristics. Because the district is growing so rapidly, they have hired over 200 teachers. Most teachers have had some prior teaching experience, but some teachers have not. This may account for the lower average number of years of experience than the state.

Table 5

Teacher Characteristics

	Average Teaching Experience	Teacher's with Bachelor's Degree	Teacher's with Master's Degree & Above
District	8.9 years	58.9%	41.1%
State	14.4 years	55.6%	44.2%

According to the 1990 U.S. Census Report for the targeted city, the population is 85,351. In 1990, 92.9% of the population are White, 1.9% are Black, 0.09% are Native American, 4.8% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.3% are listed as other. Of the White population, 1.9% are of Hispanic origin. The total number of households in this community, as of the 1990 census, is 29,259. Of those, 23,101, or 79%, are family households. Among family households, 72.0% are comprised of married couples, while 8.3% consisted of single parent

households. Family households that include children are 43.1% of the total number of households. The socioeconomic status of the community indicates the median family income is $67,827. The per capita income is $23,934. Of those residents in the targeted community who were employed in 1990, 46.9% were employed in managerial and professional specialty positions. Thirty-eight point four percent are employed in technical, sales and administrative positions, 5.9% in service positions, 5.4% in precision production, craft, and repair occupations, 0.4% in farming, forestry, and fishing occupations, and 3.1% as operators, fabricators and laborers. In this community the median home price is $176,200 and the median rent is $698 per month. This city houses many large businesses as well as shopping centers, restaurants, park district facilities including pools and parks, public and private golf courses, and places of worship (Department of Community Development, 1992).

Regional and National Context of the Problem

The problem of lack of social skills among children has generated a larger concern about the social well-being of society on a national level. Miringoff (as cited in Garbarino, 1997) explains how the *Index of Social Health for the United States* showed a decline in the well-being of our society from 1970 to 1992. The Index is based on 16 measures such as teenage suicide, dropout rates, drug abuse, and homicide. It ranges from 0 to 100, with 100 being the best. In those 22 years, the Index showed a decline from 74 to 41. Garbarino (1997) urges the public to take action as he explains his definition of a *socially toxic environment* as:

> ...the social world of children, the social context in which they grow up, has become poisonous to their development--just as toxic substances in the environment threaten human well-being and survival. The nature of physical toxicity is a matter for public policy and private concern. (pp. 13-14)

This problem of lack of social skills is usually identified as an emotional or behavioral problem among children. Evidence of this problem is shown in a study done by Achenbach and Howell (as cited in Garbarino, 1997). They found that 10% of children studied in 1976 were doing so poorly socially and/or emotionally that they could be candidates for therapy. In 1989, however, 18% of children studied were found to be candidates for therapy. The reason for the increasing numbers of children who display signs of serious behavior and developmental problems is due to the many negative influences of our ever-declining society (Garbarino, 1997). Children are extremely vulnerable to these societal influences, as they so desperately need to have a stable environment and positive role models in order to learn how to become cooperative and productive members of society. It seems that adults have failed to place importance on becoming a socially successful citizen, and have placed more emphasis on academic and/or materialistic success.

Berreth and Berman (1997) discuss how today's children face a very challenging environment. They explain how children feel hopeless, powerless, and helpless which undermine their ability to trust and help others, as well as see any meaningful point to their own future (1997). Educators must help

nurture empathy and self-discipline in our children, as these two skills have been identified as prerequisites for character development by Amitai Etzioni, a George Washington University sociologist (as cited in Berreth & Berman, 1997). "Together, these skills provide the foundation for moral behavior" (p.24).

Grimley, Zucker, Fakouri, and Thompson (1991) discuss the need for developing prosocial behaviors in children as they extend this problem to a much larger context than that of a national one. They explain how the invention of the light bulb, radio, telephone and other technological advances have caused the nations of the world to become more and more interdependent. The authors discuss how the major events of the world have far outpaced the rate at which education has adjusted to these changes. The article points out that "...interdependency of life on...Earth will require better understanding of others, which in turn will require greater emphasis on perspective-taking and empathy. Human capacity for caring must go beyond egoistic motivation" (Batson, as cited in Grimley et al, 1991, p.402). As Americans, we cannot continue to consider only our own national or regional interests (Grimley et al, 1991). As a society in the late 20th century, we must promote prosocial skills and behaviors in our children. "A more prosocial global society will ultimately contribute to the children's rights movement by serving the best interests of children through enhancement of the quality of their lives" (Grimley et al, 1991, p.405).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of lack of social skills in the targeted fourth grade class, the students were given a survey (Appendix A) after completing a cooperative group activity as instructed by the researcher. This survey recorded their attitudes and feelings about working and cooperating with others. Twenty-four fourth grade students were involved. A letter was sent home to the parents explaining the project before it began (Appendix B). No parents expressed concern about their child participating in the research project and surveys. The results of the survey are presented in Table six.

Generally, the students in the targeted class had ambivalent feelings about working in groups. Ironically, the majority of students (83.3%) stated that they would rather work alone, yet the majority of students (83.3%) also reported that they would rather work in groups. This may be due to a misunderstanding of the two questions, as one is a non-behavior of the other. The biggest problem documented at this site was the feeling that most students' opinions and ideas were not heard and/or listened to by their peers. Sixty-six point seven percent of

Table 6

Results of Student Survey

	Always	Sometimes	Never
1. like cooperative groups	8.3%	83.3%	8.3%
2. rather work alone	8.3%	83.3%	8.3%
3. rather work in groups	8.3%	83.3%	8.3%
4. disagree in groups	0%	75%	25%
5. groups get work done	54.1%	41.7%	4.2%
6. groups accomplish tasks	45.8%	50%	4.2%
7. you talk, others listen	8.3%	66.7%	25%
8. others talk, you listen	66.7%	29.1%	4.2%
9. respect other's opinion	83.3%	12.5%	4.2%
10. others respect your opinion	4.2%	78.3%	17.4%

the students surveyed felt that they were listened to only some of the time, while 78.3% felt that their opinions shared with the group were respected only some of the time.

Another method of documenting the problem at the targeted site was a teacher checklist (Appendix C) which was completed by the researcher during the initial cooperative group experience. This checklist shows the deficit area(s) of social skills for each student in the targeted classroom. The researcher will

continue to use the checklist as documentation throughout the duration of the research process. The results of the initial checklist are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Results of Teacher Checklist

	Percent of Students
Lacks turn taking skills	16.7%
Lacks defending skills	4.2%
Lacks responsibility	12.5%
Lacks listening skills	8.3%
Lacks independence	8.3%
Lacks self-control	4.2%
Lacks personal commitment to rules	4.2%
Seeks power over the teacher	8.3%
Seeks attention over the teacher	12.5%
Seeks attention over other students	4.2%
Lacks confidence (relies on teacher)	8.3%

The students in the targeted class were observed during the initial cooperative activity. Most students worked well together in this particular activity. Sixteen point seven percent of the students showed deficits in turn taking skills. They often had to be reminded by the classroom teacher and their group members to allow others to speak their mind also. The next largest

problems sited are a lack of responsibility (12.5%) and seeking attention over the teacher (12.5%). The students who were cited as lacking responsibility often did not take ownership in the group's final product. They also were not able to explain parts or all of the finished product when asked. Several students wanted excessive attention from the teacher. Many of these students would ask the teacher a question simply for the sake of asking a question. The students were instructed to ask members of their group or the "checker" for clarification. Students who sought attention from the teacher did not follow these instructions and often asked questions or wanted clarification about instructions that were just stated to the entire class.

The final method of documentation for evidence of the problem is anecdotal records. These records are kept by the researcher and the classroom teacher, and will document any lack of prosocial behaviors among students in the targeted classroom, such as disagreements and/or arguments, physical fights, discipline referrals to the office, and disrespect towards another peer and/or adult. These observations will be recorded throughout the duration of the research process. It should be noted that the researcher is not the classroom teacher. The researcher will be coming into the targeted classroom once a week to give the social skills instruction. The classroom teacher will then use cooperative groups throughout the week for content instruction. Both the researcher and the classroom teacher will keep these anecdotal records.

Probable Causes

The literature suggests several causes for the lack of social skills and prosocial behavior amongst children today. One such cause, as described by Bellanca, is the "dissolution of the traditional family" (1992, p. 201). This includes single parents, dual-working parents, and no-parent families. Sociologists have determined that in our society today, we have more single parents and dual-working parents than ever before. Because of this, the parent(s) have much less time to spend with their children. In turn, the children do not have the positive role models they need to learn basic social skills, appropriate behavior, and moral and ethical values (Bellanca, 1992). This has become a serious problem which affects the social well-being of children today. This does not necessarily make present-day parents "bad", as today's society often requires both parents to work in order to provide for their children what their parents were able to provide for them with only one parent supporting the family. Garbarino states that "...some studies report a 50% decrease over the past 30 years in the amount of time parents are spending with kids in constructive activities. The lack of adult supervision and time spent doing constructive, cooperative activities compounds the effects of other negative influences in the social environment for kids" (1997, p. 14).

In the targeted community, about 54% of married families have dual-working parents. This statistic seems to show the possible existence of a lack of quality time that parents spend with their children. Eight point six percent of households in the targeted community are single-parent families. Of those

families, 87.3% of the single-parents are working (Department of Community Development, 1992). This gives reason to believe that some of the students in the targeted site will not have a solid base of social skills. Because of this, Bellanca states, "The result is more students arriving at the schoolhouse door without the basic social skills in place" (Bellanca, 1992, p. 202).

Another cause of this rapidly growing problem, as discussed by Bellanca (1992), is the inappropriate TV models that inundate the air waves today. Because parents are not at home spending time with their children as much as they used to, the television has become an "electronic baby-sitter" for many children. "Television, with its aptitude for modeling anti-social, anti-caring behaviors, has filled a void in the character formation of today's youth" (Bellanca, 1992, p. 202). Much of what children see on television is violent, shows disrespect to authority, and exposes them to graphic sexual content. "...the violence they [today's youth] see around them desensitizes them to their own pain and that of others" (Berreth & Berman, 1997, p. 25). The researcher has noticed more and more children in the school setting modeling behaviors that they see on TV shows and cartoons aimed at adults. It seems that, although television shows now have ratings to warn parents of shows with mature content, many parents to not heed these warnings. It is alarming to hear young children quote characters from adult television shows that are on very late at night.

Another possible cause for the lack of prosocial behaviors in children is the decrease in society's well-being. The 1990's have shown some of the

highest percentages of teenage suicide, unemployment, drug abuse, drop out rates, and poverty (Garbarino, 1997). With so many changes in our society, we need to prepare our children for the future. Some believe this to mean that our children must become knowledgeable of the ways of the world at a much younger age. Because of this, children today are losing what should be treasured; their childhood. Garbarino (1997) discusses how society today is not recognizing childhood as a special time that is very different from adulthood. "It was a grave error of society to continue in the belief that the child should be molded in the exact image of the adult" (Montessori as cited in Salkowski, 1994, p. 32). The pressures and demands placed on children today are very different from what their parents experienced as children. Garbarino (1997) feels this is due to a greater awareness of society's problems. As Garbarino (1997) reflects on his childhood years, he admits that children were kidnapped, young girls got pregnant, teenagers were using drugs and alcohol, and child abuse did exist, but most children did not know about it. Today's children are much more aware of the possible dangers around them. Garbarino states, "...youth today must contend with a constant stream of messages that undermine their sense of security" (1997, p. 14).

A fourth possible cause of this problem is our nation's growing economic disparity (Berreth & Berman, 1997). Many children are required to earn their own keep in their family. "At present, about one in five of all U.S. children...live below the officially defined poverty level" (Garbarino, 1997, p. 15). It should also be noted that "...among modern societies, the United States has the biggest gap

between rich and poor" (Garbarino, 1997, p.15). However, in the targeted community, less than 1% of the children live below the poverty level. Therefore, this may not be a dominating factor that contributes to the lack of social skills in children at the targeted site.

Finally, an increased emphasis on self-interest and material goods may be a cause for the lack of prosocial behaviors in children. "Young people are easily seduced by material culture that promotes instant gratification" (Berreth & Berman, 1997, p. 25). Because every generation wants more for their children than they had for themselves, some wonder if children have to work for anything at all. Children are exposed to the many material goods our society offers through television, radio, and computers. Our society has become very competitive, whereas measuring success by how many material goods one owns. The same thinking has transferred into the schools. "Public schools, because they are free of religious influence, have a value empty or 'every man for himself' philosophy which undermines cooperation, responsibility, and respect" (Bellanca, 1992, p. 202). This self-sufficient attitude has been detrimental to the cooperative movement taking place in both the workplace and the schools.

After much research on this topic, one realizes that this is a prevalent problem throughout our nation. Many factors such as the dissolution of the traditional family (Bellanca, 1992), inappropriate TV models (Bellanca, 1992), the decrease in society's well-being (Garbarino, 1997), growing economic disparity (Berreth & Berman, 1997), and an increased emphasis on self-interest

and material goods (Berreth & Berman, 1997) have all contributed to the lack of social skills in our society's children today.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Many solutions to this problem of lack of social skills development in children were found after reviewing the literature. One such solution is integrating social and emotional learning into the classroom environment (Bellanca, 1992; Berliner & Casanova, 1989; Cummings & Haggerty, 1997; Elias & Branden-Muller, 1994; Grimley et al, 1991; Long, 1995; McCafferty, 1990; Miller, 1991; Rimm, 1997; Salkowski, 1994). Through this model, social and emotional learning should be presented in the classroom in manageable components. The teacher will constantly model successful performances of skills, while giving opportunities for the students to practice. In this type of classroom environment, the students are always given feedback and reinforcement from their teacher.

Along the same lines as the previous solution strategy, another belief in the remediation of lack of social skills development is to simply teach social skills in the classroom (Bellanca, 1992; Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991; Berliner & Cassanova, 1989; Berreth & Berman, 1997; Cummings & Haggerty, 1997; Fad &

Ross, 1995; Jalongo, 1988; Neel & Cessna, 1993; Ostlund, 1992). "Social skills do not develop for the class as a whole without deliberate, specific and repeated attention to them" (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991, p. 50). Bellanca and Fogarty (1991) discuss the five crucial steps in teaching social skills effectively to children. Those steps include: hook, teach, practice, observe, and reward. The hook lesson focuses the students' attention onto the targeted social skill. While actually teaching the skill, a t-chart should be used to help students generate specific behaviors of the social skill. Practice of the skill should be conducted in short bursts in order to thoroughly reinforce the targeted skill. While the students are practicing the skill, the teacher watches for positive examples of the desired social skill. By doing this, the teacher is able to recognize the positive use of the skills and encourage all students to continue practicing it. Finally, the students should be rewarded in some way for using the social skills they have been taught in a positive manner.

Another solution found in the literature of Fad and Ross (1995) and Long (1995) is the use of prosocial signs and sayings in the classroom to promote values. Long (1995) believes:

> The socialization of children is a complex interpersonal process in which the parents and other significant adults try to pass on their values and beliefs to the next generation...One method for teaching values was the frequent use of sayings or adages (p. 2).

The use of prosocial signs in the classroom promotes a positive attitude towards one's self, learning, and others. It also promotes self-control and positive

behavior. These posters must be displayed prominently throughout the classroom in order to motivate the students.

Several educational projects were recommended to be implemented in the classroom to facilitate the social skills development in children. One such project, as described by Cummings and Haggerty (1997), is Raising Healthy Children. This project provides intervention that bonds students to family and school. Strategies included in this method are staff development courses, parenting workshops, home-based services, and student activities. Studies have shown positive effects of the program to include increased positive attachment to family and schools, decreased suspensions and expulsions, decreased drug use and delinquency, and increased scores on standardized tests.

Another project recommended by Bellanca (1992) is Project Extend. In this project, teachers and principals learned how to use cooperative learning as a critical instruction tool to teach social skills. Steps to this program include: the hook, lesson, practice, reflection, feedback, and transfer. Assessments include weekly entries in a cooperation journal.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of social skills instruction, during the period of September, 1997 to December, 1997, the targeted fourth grade class will increase cooperative behavior as measured by teacher checklists, teacher observation, and student surveys.

In order to accomplish the objective described above, the following three process objectives are necessary and were written to guide the sequence and selection of activities to be included in the action plan.

1. Classroom environment will be designed to foster prosocial behavior.
2. Direct instruction of social skills will be implemented.
3. Teacher will devise a series of cooperative learning activities that foster prosocial behavior.

Project Action Plan

I. Data collection to show evidence of the problem (September)

A. Opening Cooperative Activity

1. Teacher instructs on the roles of cooperative groups

a. worrier

b. recorder

c. materials manager

d. encourager

2. Students will complete one of the following lessons: "What's your role?" "Cooperative? Competitive? or Individualistic?" or

"Torn Circles" (as described Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991, pp. 20-25)

B. Teacher Checklist [on-going] (Appendix A)

C. Student Survey (Appendix B)

D. Teacher Observation/Anecdotal Records [on-going]

II. Design classroom to foster prosocial behavior (September)

A. Cooperative activity with prosocial signs and sayings (as described Long)

1. Students are grouped and assigned roles
2. Groups are given prosocial sayings or adages on poster board from the teacher
3. Students are to draw a picture that illustrates the corresponding saying on poster board
4. Groups will present their posters and will discuss their interpretation
5. Posters will be hung throughout the room for the entire school year

a. As social situations arise amongst peers in the classroom, the posters are referred to by the teacher as reminders to help students reflect and/or solve the situation at hand

b. Posters will also be used as a reference when students are journaling

B. Seating arrangement of classroom (as described Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991)

1. teacher instructs how groups should sit in triangles or circles, and shows how and/or where to move to when working in groups

2. group seating arrangement allows for groups to interact in a face-to-face manner

III. Teacher will instruct specific social skills on a weekly basis (September - December)

A. Social skill instruction will be taught once a week for 30 minutes using the following techniques (as described Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991, p.49)

1. Hook Lesson

a. role playing

b. story

c. non-academic activity

2. Teach or Instruct

a. T-chart for the targeted skill (example: listening)

b. T-chart for the non-targeted skill (example: non-listening)

3. Practice

a. guided skill practice in 3-5 minute segments

b. emphasis is placed on targeted skill while students work in cooperative learning groups and are encouraged to be aware of it throughout the work session

4. Observe/Reflect

a. teacher will watch for and point out positive examples of the targeted skill as they appear within the group work session

b. students will reflect on the group dynamics and/or the frequency of positive examples of the targeted skill through reflective/metacognitive activities

i. Mrs. Potter's Questions

ii. PMI

iii. reflective classroom discussion

5. Reward for displaying positive targeted behavior

a. individual

i. praise and/or

ii. stickers/tokens/coupons

b. group

i. praise and/or

ii. stickers/tokens/coupons

B. The following social skills will be emphasized on a week-by-week basis:

1. Respect

2. Self-control

3. Listening

4. Taking turns

5. Responsibility

6. Fairness

7. Sharing

8. Helpfulness

9. Independence

10. Comforting (empathy/sympathy)

C. The teacher will also continue to emphasize and assess the weekly social skill, while building on all previous social skills, through cooperative learning groups used for academic purposes. (September - December)

1. Teacher checklist [on-going] (Appendix A)

2. Teacher observation/anecdotal records

IV. Data collection to assess effectiveness of interventions (End of December)

A. Teacher checklist [on-going] (Appendix A)

B. Student surveys (Appendix B)

C. Teacher observation/anecdotal records

D. Compare and summarize the information from pre-assessments (I) and post-assessments (IV)

Methods of Assessment

To determine the extent to which the problem presently exists within the targeted fourth grade classroom and to determine the effects of the intervention, the teacher-researcher designed an assessment plan consisting of three key components. These components include teacher checklists, teacher anecdotal records, and student surveys. The teacher checklists and anecdotal records will be on-going in nature, and will be compared and analyzed from the beginning of the intervention to the conclusion of it. The student survey will be given twice; once after the first introductory cooperative activity, and again after the final cooperative activity.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The terminal objective of the intervention addressed the effect of social skills instruction on cooperative behavior in students. Indications were that students today are lacking exposure to social skills instruction, which in turn interfered with positive interaction among peers in the classroom. Therefore, the terminal objective stated:

As a result of social skills instruction, during the period of September, 1997 to December, 1997, the targeted fourth grade class will increase cooperative behavior as measured by teacher checklists, teacher observation, and student surveys. In order to accomplish the objective, the following three process objectives are necessary and were written to guide the sequence and selection of activities to be included in the action plan.

1. Classroom environment will be designed to foster prosocial behavior.
2. Direct instruction of social skills will be implemented.
3. Teacher will devise a series of cooperative learning activities that foster prosocial behavior.

Interventions

Social skills instruction was implemented in the targeted fourth grade class once a week for 30 minutes, as originally planned. To begin with, the researcher instructed the lesson, "Cooperative, Competitive, or Individualistic" (as described Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991, pp. 20-23). The students were taught

the responsibilities of each role while working in cooperative groups. The roles of this activity were as follows: cutter, paster, and arranger. The students were divided into three groups of eight. Each group was assigned a theme: cooperative, competitive, or individualistic. The students cut pictures from magazines that fit their assigned theme and hung them on a mobile. While the students were completing this task, the researcher used the teacher observation checklist to observe individual students as they interacted in their groups. To reinforce cognitive processing, each group presented their mobile to the class and explained their picture choices. After the lesson was completed, the students filled out the student survey (Appendix A). The researcher originally planned this lesson to last for two 30 minute sessions. However, it took three 30 minute sessions to complete.

The second activity implemented into the targeted classroom was designed to foster prosocial behavior with prosocial signs and sayings (as described Long, 1995). The students were randomly put into cooperative learning groups and were assigned roles. Each group was given a poster with a prosocial saying or adage on it. The students were responsible for illustrating a picture that correlates with their given saying. The groups presented their poster to the class and discussed their interpretation of it. Finally, the posters were hung throughout the classroom and were used as a reference when the students were working in cooperative groups. The researcher also instructed the students on the most beneficial way to arrange their seats while working in groups so as to encourage face-to-face interaction. Again, this activity took

twice as long as originally planned, and had to be carried over to the next 30 minute session.

Finally, the researcher began implementing the social skills instruction weekly, and reinforced the skills through cooperative learning groups. Social skill instruction was based on the techniques described by Bellanca and Fogarty (1991). Each lesson began with a hook activity which consisted of a non-academic activity like listening to a story, playing a game, or role playing (Appendix D). Next, the researcher led the students through a t-chart of the targeted skill and non-targeted skill. After the students became familiar with the t-charts, they often took turns leading the class through one. The students were then given time to practice the skill they just learned, usually through a cooperative group activity. During this time, the researcher was able to intermittently complete the teacher observation checklist, while pointing out positive examples of the targeted skill as they appeared within the group work session. The students in the targeted class responded well to verbal praise from the researcher and their classroom teacher. Originally, it was planned for the students to complete a reflective/metacognitive activity after each social skill was presented. However, due to the short amount of time allotted weekly for the implementation of this project, this portion of the lesson was often done in a discussion format rather than a written activity.

Initially, the researcher focused on ten target social skills to instruct. They included: respect, self-control, listening, taking turns, responsibility, fairness, sharing, helpfulness, independence, and comforting. Due to

unforeseen interruptions in the weekly schedule (field trips, assemblies, special projects/presentations), the researcher had to eliminate some of the targeted social skills from the plan. These skills include: responsibility, helpfulness, independence, and comforting. After the researcher became familiar with the targeted class, she was able to determine which social skills were important to present to the class based on observations of cooperative activities. The researcher extended the length of the research project by two months. Instead of completing the research by the end of December, 1997, it was extended to the beginning of February, 1998. It must be noted that the students were not in attendance for two weeks due to winter vacation which ran from the end of December, 1997 to the beginning of January, 1998.

The researcher intended to emphasize and assess the transfer of the weekly target skill, while building on all previously instructed social skills, through cooperative learning groups used for academic purposes. Due to a strict schedule, the researcher was unable to observe the targeted class during other academic times when they were working in cooperative learning groups. The classroom teacher and researcher met informally to discuss the cooperative behaviors of the students throughout the remainder of the week when the researcher was not present. However, these behaviors were not formally assessed or documented, as originally planned. The researcher only completed formal observation checklists when in the classroom during the scheduled thirty minute session. The observations focused on cooperative behaviors during the practice portion of the lesson.

Presentation and Analysis of Project Results

In order to assess the effect of social skills instruction on cooperative behavior of the targeted class, the researcher kept anecdotal records of cooperative activities, as well as analyzed the results of the student survey (Appendix A) which was given before and after the implementation of the instruction. The results of both student surveys are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Results of Student Surveys

	Always		Sometimes		Never	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. like cooperative groups	8.3%	15.3%	83.3%	77%	8.3%	7.7%
2. rather work alone	8.3%	11.5%	83.3%	84.6%	8.3%	3.9%
3. rather work in groups	8.3%	7.7%	83.3%	88.4%	8.3%	3.9%
4. disagree in groups	0%	7.7%	75%	77%	25%	15.3%
5. groups get work done	54.1%	53.8%	41.7%	46.2%	4.2%	0%
6. groups accomplish tasks	45.8%	42.3%	50%	53.8%	4.2%	3.9%
7. you talk, others listen	8.3%	26.9%	66.7%	69.2%	25%	3.9%
8. others talk, you listen	66.7%	57.7%	29.1%	42.3%	4.2%	0%
9. respect other's opinion	83.3%	84.6%	12.5%	11.5%	4.2%	3.9%
10. others respect your opinion	4.2%	23.1%	78.3%	65.4%	17.4%	11.5%

Generally, the number of students in the targeted class who enjoyed working in cooperative groups increased by 7%, as shown in item 1. The

biggest increase was seen in the "Always" category of "when you talk, others listen" (item 7), and "others respect your opinion" (item 10). The first increased by 18.6%, while the latter increased by 18.9%. The researcher accounts this to the repetition of the "respect" theme throughout the social skills instruction. As noted on the final entry of the researcher's weekly journal, the students pointed out how all the other topics tied in to respect (Appendix E). One student in the target class stated, "If you respect others, you automatically listen, take turns, share, and use self-control." The students really seemed to understand the importance of respect, both to self and others, which carried over in their responses on the survey.

Some responses on the post survey showed results that were not favorable to cooperative groups. Item numbers 2,3,4, and 8 all had one category (always, sometimes, or never) which either increased or decreased in numbers and which did not favor cooperative groups. However, each of the items listed above also had one category (always, sometimes, or never) which either increased or decreased in numbers in favor of cooperative groups. The number of students who would always rather work alone increased by 3.2%. However, the number of students who would rather never work alone decreased by 4.4%. The number of students who would always rather work in groups decreased by 0.6%, while this number decreased by 4.4% in the never category. An increase was also noted in the number of students who felt they always disagree in cooperative groups from 0% to 7.7%. In contrast, the number of students who felt that they never disagree in cooperative groups decreased by

9.7%. Finally, there was a 9% decrease in the number of students who felt they always listen when others talk. This may be due to more honest responses given on the post survey, as the students now realize when they are not using appropriate social skills, and what areas they are deficient in. However, there was also a decrease of the number of students who felt when others talk, they never listen from 4.2% to 0%.

Items 5, 6, and 9 on the survey had responses that basically remained the same on both the pre and post survey. Items 5 and 6 pertained to whether or not groups completed work and accomplished the tasks of the activity. The "Always" and "Sometimes" categories both had percentages that remained in the mid-forties or mid-fifties. In favor of cooperative groups, Item 5 (groups get work done) decreased in the "Never" category from 4.2% to 0%. Item 9 referred to how well the students felt they respected other's opinions. The "Always" category remained with percentages in the mid-eighties. The "Sometimes" category showed percentages from 12.5% to 11.5%. Again, in favor of cooperative groups, the "Never" category decreased from 4.2% to 3.9%.

The researcher also completed formal observations of the targeted class during cooperative group activities, usually after a social skill was presented to the class. Originally, the researcher intended to observe the targeted class at various times throughout the week whenever they were engaged in cooperative learning. As explained earlier, this proved to be unreasonable do to strict scheduling of both the researcher and the classroom teacher. Therefore, all observations of the targeted class were immediately following social skills

instruction during the practice portion of the lesson. The results of the researcher's observations are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Results of Teacher Observations

	Observation					
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
Number of deficit skill areas	22	18	9	7	9	7

Based on the researcher's monthly observations of the targeted class, there was a decrease in the number of deficit social skills displayed during cooperative group activities. The researcher attributes the high number of skill deficits in the initial observation to the new school year, and the students familiarizing themselves with their new teacher, new school, and new expectations. At that time, the students did not know the researcher and the purpose of her presence in the room. This too may have affected the initial observation, as the students were aware of the researcher's purpose in the classroom during the remainder of the observations, and they may have been displaying their best social behavior. However, the last four observations were fairly consistent with the number of lacking social skills. The students also became comfortable with the researcher in the room, and did not seem to be on

their best behavior or notice her presence by the end of the implementation of the project .

Finally, the researcher also kept a weekly journal documenting the progress of the project. Upon reflection of the journal, it should be noted how the researcher consistently documented how seriously the students were taking the social skills instruction and activities. When the researcher and classroom teacher met periodically to discuss the class' performance and transfer of social skills into classroom activities, the teacher reported some positive changes in the students' behavior. As noted in the researcher's fifth weekly journal, the students were reminding each other to "be good listeners" and to "be respectful" at various times throughout the school day, especially when they noticed a classmate using socially inappropriate skills (Appendix F). The students seemed to enjoy the activities that followed the social skills instruction, and worked well in the groups they were randomly assigned to.

Overall, the researcher feels that the implementation of social skills instruction did have a positive effect on cooperative group behavior. While the pre and post student surveys did show some results that were unfavorable to working in cooperative groups, the majority of the responses stayed the same or were in favor of cooperative groups. The monthly observations of the targeted class also showed results in favor of social skills instruction, as the number of deficits in social skills decreased throughout the implementation of the project. As noted through the researcher's weekly journal, the students took the social skills instruction and practice activities very seriously. Some transfer was noted

into everyday classroom activities as well. Though the researcher noted areas of weakness and improvement, the three areas of assessment showed favorable results to social skills instruction which positively impacted cooperative group behavior.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this project show favorable results to social skills instruction positively impacting cooperative group behavior. This is a topic which needs to be addressed more and more in our schools today. For various reasons, the family structure is changing from earlier this century, which in turn places a new demand on the educators of today. Not only is there more information to teach to students than there was 100, or 50, or even 20 years ago, but the schools now see the need to implement some social skills training into the classroom so students can be better prepared for their future. Educators are more likely to place importance on this essential component of education if they see can see positive results from their efforts. This research project can be one such piece of evidence in favor of social skills instruction.

Based on the results of this research project, in order to design a social skills program that is most effective, the researcher feels certain areas must be considered a priority. The parts of the research project that deviated from the original action plan are some of those vital areas. Time is one of the most essential factors of any new curriculum implementation. In this action research project, the researcher was not the classroom teacher, but a specialist teacher who came into the classroom once a week for 30 minutes. While the students

seemed to enjoy the variety, it seems logical that it would be more effective for the classroom teacher to give the social skills instruction. This way, he/she could monitor the transfer of the skills taught throughout the day. The classroom teacher could also remind students of what social skills they need to be using when necessary. This was the original intent of the researcher. However, because of the limited amount of time spent in the target classroom, this was very difficult. While the assessment instruments used were valid, it seems that it would be easier to assess the effectiveness of the social skills instruction implemented if the researcher was able to remain in the classroom for a longer period of time or at different instructional times.

Another vital component of implementing a social skills curriculum is longevity. An on-going program that continued through each grade level would be ideal. However, it would seem that some social skills instruction is better than no social skills instruction at all. As stated earlier in the chapter, the researcher did not finish instructing the original ten target social skills. Although the students were unaware of this, the researcher felt the program ended abruptly, even as it was implemented for five months. The social skills that were left without instruction were important and probably would have impacted more the improved cooperative behavior. The school in which this project took place implements a "character education" program which highlights a social skill every month. Teachers are encouraged to integrate the character education theme into their classrooms as much as possible. At the beginning of every month, the new character education skill is introduced and defined during morning

announcements. This shows an effort on the school's part to implement a program dealing with this very important topic. However, it is not a mandatory part of the curriculum, and teachers are encouraged to touch on it, but are really free to integrate it as much or as little as they want. Again, this small exposure to appropriate social skills is more beneficial than none at all. This way, the students are at least hearing the same sequence of appropriate social skill characteristics year after year.

The information presented in this action research project shows favorable results for social skills instruction as it improves cooperative behavior. Two factors will greatly impact the effectiveness of a social skills program: time commitment and longevity. Research has shown that students today lack the social skills necessary to become successful members of the working world. The changes in the traditional family structure dictates that schools need to place importance on social skills instruction. Social skills instruction needs to become a part of the mandatory curriculum in schools across the country. To do this, educators must sense the importance of social skills training, and see the positive results that can come of it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Student Survey

Name: _____ Date: _____

DIRECTIONS: Read each question below carefully and place a check under the column that applies. **A** for Always, **S** for Sometimes, and **N** for Never. This is to be done individually and will be collected when everyone is finished. Be honest when marking your answers.

GENERAL QUESTION
How well do you think you get along with your classsmates in a cooperative group?

QUESTIONS	A	S	N
1. Do you like working in cooperative groups?			
2. Would you rather work alone?			
3. Would you rather work in groups?			
4. When in a cooperative group, do you spend most of the time disagreeing?			
5. When in a cooperative group, do you spend most of the time getting work done?			
6. When finished working in a group, all the goals of the task are accomplished.			
7. When you talk, do others listen?			
8. When others talk, do you listen?			
9. Do you respect other peoples' opinions in the group?			
10. Do other people respect you when you give your opinion?			

Appendix B
Parent Letter

September 24, 1997

Dear Parent(s),

My name is Julie Zukauskas and I am one of the supported education teachers at Elementary School. I will be working in your child's classroom periodically as a co-teacher with Ms. S. This way, any students who need help on work they are completing have an extra adult in the room to ask for assistance.

I am currently completing my master's program through IRI Skylight and St. Xavier University. As part of the graduation requirements, I am doing an action research project from now until December of this school year. The topic is teaching social skills through cooperative learning. The intent is that through instruction of certain social skills, cooperative behaviors among peers in the classroom will improve. Your child will be involved in various cooperative group activities, student surveys and journaling . I will be making observations throughout the project and results will be recorded. Participation will be in keeping with normal school procedures. These activities will not deviate from the norm, as group activities are a part of your child's daily instructional routine in Ms. S's class. Many of the activities that we do in class **will be counted** as part of your child's speaking and listening grade. If you do not want your child's **results** in the project, his or her grade will not be affected in **any** way by that decision. I look forward to working with your students in what I hope is a very effective and enjoyable project.

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments, please feel free to contact me at anytime. I will be glad to discuss the project with you in detail.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Julie Zukauskas

Appendix C
Teacher Checklist

TEACHER CHECKLIST OF STUDENT INTERACTION

DATE _____ TEACHER _____

KEY FOR CHART

SOCIAL SKILLS:		SEEKS POWER
Fairness	Responsibility	Over the teacher
Helpfulness	Respect	Over the students
Self Control	Personal Commitment to rules	
Independence	Sharing	
Rescuing	Defending	
Comforting	Listening	
Taking Turns		

SEEKS ATTENTION	LACKS CONFIDENCE	SEEKS REVENGE
Over the teacher	Over the teacher	Over the Teacher
Over the students	Over the students	Over the students

Student	Lacks Soc Skills	Power T/S	Attention T/S	Confidence T/S	Revenge T/S
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Appendix D
Example Role Playing Cards

Role Play #1

Act our a classroom of students showing disrespect to a substitute teacher.

Brainstormers #1

**Ask these questions to the class:

- What was wrong with the students in the class?
- What should the class have done? Why?

**Make a t-chart for *disrespect* (looks like/sounds like)

Role Play #2

Act out a situation where the principal is talking to some students that just got in trouble. The students are being respectful to the principal.

Brainstormers #2

**Ask these questions to the class:

- What were some things the students did to show respect?
- Why is it good that the students were respectful?
- **Make a t-chart for *respect* (looks like/sounds like)

Week of Sep. 2-6

Actions Taken:

- students completed "Student Survey"
- discussed the topics we've covered & what they've learned
- discussed why it's impt. to cooperate & work in groups

Reflection:

PLUSES (+)	MINUSES (-)	INTERESTING (?)
- students worked hard! - all participated well in discussion - students noted how "respect" ties in with all other topics!! If you are respectful, you AUTOMATICALLY take turns, listen, share, etc.	- The students seemed sad because the lessons were over! (They also noted this on the back of their surveys)	- When asked to write 2 things they liked about the lesson, and one thing they would do ~~the~~ differently, the students were very positive. Their "do different" item was usually more role playing

Comments, Notes (Continued on back, as needed): How great!

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Week of Oct 20-24

Actions Taken:

- instructed "Respect"
- students were put in groups & were given jobs (actor or brainstormer)
- each group was given a pair of cards — one w/a situation showing respect or disrespect, & the other giving examples of questions to ask the class & lead through the a discussion

Reflection:

PLUSES (+)	MINUSES (-)	INTERESTING (?)
- students really seemed to enjoy role playing - everyone took their job seriously	- didn't have time to complete + - chart	- the students are beginning to remind themselves to "be good listeners"

Comments, Notes (Continued on back, as needed):

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